

The Story of Our Parents: Arthur and Olga Weisz

by Judith (Weisz) Leff

הספר ראה אור בסיוע:

הקרן לתמיכה בספרי זיכרונות של
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THE AZRIELI FOUNDATION



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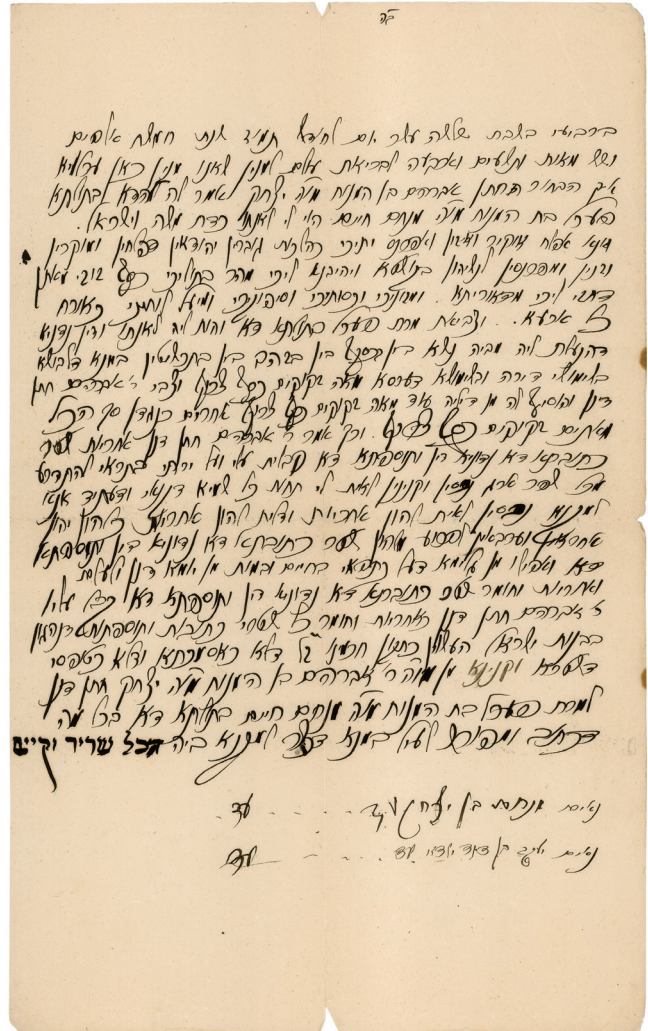
Cover: Arthur Weisz, Simchat Torah Woodcut and Autograph, 1934

“My Dear Olga,
Our children are our guarantors”

(From the last letter of our father before he was deported to Auschwitz)



Our Parents, Arthur and Olga Weisz



Our Parents' Ketubah

Our father, Arthur Weisz (Avraham ben Yitzchak and Esther), was born on October 14, 1903, in Komarno, in what was then Czechoslovakia. He studied painting at the Académie des *Beaux-Arts* (Academy of Fine Arts) in Prague, Vienna and Paris. Our father then settled in Vienna, where he met and married our mother, Olga Amsel (Perel Bracha bat Menachem Chayim and Toybe), in 1934.

Our mother was born in 1906 in Kemece, Hungary. She was orphaned at age 8 and was raised by her Aunt Tishene and her husband, the Erlauer Rav (a descendant of the Chatam Sofer) in Erlau, Hungary.

As an Orthodox Jew, our father was quite the exception among the painters and artists of his time. He davened at the well-known *Schiff Schule* and belonged to the *Tseirei Agudas Yisroel* youth movement of Vienna, which, at that time, included many of those who would become the elite of Viennese religious Jewish life (including Nathan Birnbaum and Elie Munk). It was at the *Agudah* that our father met and befriended Sigmund Forst who was just beginning his career as an illustrator. Our father introduced Forst to potential patrons, despite his being a competitor.

Vienna of the 1930's was a vibrant intellectual, artistic, and musical center, with leading figures, such as Sigmund Freud, Stefan Zweig, Gustav Klimt and Gustav Mahler. Our father was very much part of Vienna's cultural life. He played the cello and was friendly with one of Freud's disciples.

In Vienna, our father became one of the rare Jewish artists at that time who was dedicated to creating Judaica and Jewish art. In 1931 he illustrated a Pesach Haggadah and a Jewish calendar, several ink drawings depicting stark Hassidic scenes, and even brass menorahs in the Bauhaus style. He was an innovator in using the Hebrew alphabet as a decorative motif. Our father was also in demand as a portrait painter and illustrator and worked as a partner in an advertising agency. In 1935 he was asked by the WIZO Women's Organization to design the cloth that would cover Theodor Herzl's coffin.

I, Judith, was born in July 1935, the first of five children to be born.

In 1938 when the Nazis marched into Vienna, our parents fled to France. They found an apartment near the Belleville section of Paris. Many families from Central Europe sought refuge there, unfortunately, only temporarily. During their time in Paris, our parents had four more children: the twins, Georges (Yitzchak) and Henri (Chaim), Esther and Paul (Yisroel).

Our father *davened* (prayed) in a small *shtiebel* in the neighborhood, on a tiny street called *Passage Kuszner*. The wall and ceiling were whitewashed, so my father decorated them with all kinds of Jewish motifs. Georges and Henri had their *Bar Mitzvot* in this shul after the war when the family returned to their apartment.

In France, our father continued to earn a living as an artist. One of my earliest memories of my father is him taking me along to draw the portrait of a woman, so as not to be in a situation of *yichud* with her.

In May 1940 the Germans invaded France and immediately instituted anti-Jewish laws with the enthusiastic collaboration of the French Vichy government. On May 14, 1941, Jewish men between the ages of 18 and

40 were called to report to the Paris police. Our father was arrested in this wave of arrests, along with more than 5,000 Jews. The detainees were sent to the detention camps of Pithiviers and Bon-la-Roland. Our father was sent to Pithiviers. During the time our father was detained, the situation of Jews in France worsened, and more German laws, including the requirement to wear a Jewish star, were imposed on the Jewish community.

In Pithiviers, our father was an important figure in the active cultural and religious life in the camp. He painted the decorations on the walls of the small *shul* that the religious men had built for themselves. During that time, he was somehow allowed to earn some money by drawing pictures of the officials of the camp, as well as other detainees. With that money, he bought provisions to send to our mother who remained in Paris with limited financial resources and five children to feed, aged one-month to six-years. Our mother wanted to help her husband as much as possible, and she sent him packages with art supplies, food and clothing. Our father was allowed one home visit in August 1941, as mentioned in the letters.

Our father was held in Pithiviers until he was deported with Transport 6 to Auschwitz-Birkenau on July 17, 1942. He did not return, and we do not know his date of death.

Throughout the war, our mother was left alone with five young children, and barely spoke French. From the summer of 1942, she had the responsibility to save herself and us children from the Gestapo, who twice tried to arrest us. We were in hiding at different times and in different places, and some of the time we remained together. Our mother was in contact with organizations who tried to save Jewish children by hiding them among Gentiles who were willing to risk their lives. We owe an eternal debt of gratitude to Ghislaine and Raymond Brulard and to Rosa and Henri Gourmond who hid us and saved our lives. Throughout that most difficult time, our mother showed incredible courage and ingenuity in keeping in touch with each one of us, and we never felt abandoned. At one point, she even took the great risk of having us together again, but only for a short time, unfortunately.

While we were in hiding, a French family took over our apartment and refused to give it up even after we returned to Paris after the war. Our mother initiated a lawsuit to evict them, which she eventually won. During those two years, however, we lived in temporary, rented dwellings. One of our father's brothers and a sister had taken refuge in London, and they offered to take the twins and me until we got our apartment back. I stayed with them in London for nearly two years, and the twins joined for a shorter stay.

For many months after the end of the war, I used to go with my mother every week to the Lutecia Hotel where they posted a list of those who had survived the concentration camps. We were always painfully disappointed.

After the war, our mother found herself all alone with her five children and with very few surviving relatives. All that was left of her and our father's numerous relatives were our mother's two brothers, Uncle Hugo and his wife, Tante Sari, and Uncle Icu and his wife, Tante Lilly. On our father's side, we had Uncle Wilmos and his wife, Anci, and Tante Pepus and her husband, Fixler. None of these relatives lived in France, although they were helpful with financial and moral support. Our mother was left to struggle on her own with the schooling of five children and their religious education. In addition, she grappled with our health issues, including my brother, Henri, who had lost an arm to an explosive device.

Our mother's efforts paid off. We all earned post-graduate degrees and have become esteemed professionals in our fields. During all those good, bad and difficult times our mother never lost her sense of humor, her unshakable confidence in *HaShem* and in us children, and her unconditional love for us all. She was very

careful in her loving observance of *mitzvot*. In particular, she did not allow herself to eat meat during the whole duration of the war. Our mother loved beauty, and she made it a point to beautify *Shabbat* and the *Yamim Tovim* in the best possible way. She carried herself in a dignified way, eliciting respect from everyone. A rabbi who knew her described my mother as characterizing the *middah* of *Tiferet*.

After Georges and Esther made Aliya, our mother followed them in 1974. She found an apartment near them in Jerusalem and, despite her advanced age, adapted to many things. I think that she found some happiness being close to her children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, she became afflicted with many different and debilitating ailments. Her last years were further saddened by the consequences of a botched operation which was supposed to restore her hearing.

Our mother passed away peacefully in her sleep on her birthday, 11 Adar, 1983.
May her loving memory be a blessing to all her numerous descendants.



Judith, George, Henri, Esther and Paul. Paris, France, 1947



Judith, George, Henri, Esther and Paul. Paris, France, 1941



Judith, George, Henri, Esther and Paul. Paris, France, 1947

The Letters

In 1942 when the Nazis and the French Vichy Regime, decided to liquidate the Pithiviers camp and send the inmates on convoys to Auschwitz-Birkenau, they ordered the prisoners to send all their belongings home in a suitcase. Our father sent a suitcase containing all the letters that our mother had written him during his period of detention. When our mother passed away in 1983 in Jerusalem, we, the children, found her correspondence with our father.

The letters were handwritten in French, German, and Hungarian. At one point, Jews were forbidden to write in any foreign language other than French, in order to allow the French officials to read the letters. This was a sadistic ploy, as most of the prisoners or their relatives (like my mother) were newcomers to France, and thus not native French speakers. Our father knew how to write in French, but our mother relied on the kindness of a Jewish friend, a Hungarian female physician, who, after a day's work, would translate our mother's letters from Hungarian. This special woman was later murdered by the Nazis.

These letters are a unique correspondence that reflects the difficult days of a young couple separated by the Vichy Regime. It is difficult to read the letters without being moved to tears.

In the letters, our father shows himself as a loving father, asking in detail after the welfare and progress of each one of his children. In some of the letters, he also wrote directly to me, his eldest child, and described upcoming holidays, accompanied with illustrations and small drawings.

In one letter, my father shared a parable with me, based on the verse from *Tehillim* (56:9) "Place my tears in your flask." He wrote to me about a queen, whose husband had been imprisoned. The queen cried so much, that her tears filled a flask. She then took the flask of tears, and poured the tears on her husband's chains, dissolving them, and, thus freeing him. My father found profound inspiration and hope from this verse in *Tehillim* and shared that message of hope with my mother and me in his letter.

Our mother's letters present her as a very strong woman who confronted enormous challenges in raising five young children on her own, while facing uncertainty about the future of her husband, her children and herself.

During the time our father was imprisoned in Pithiviers, he always believed that he would eventually be released. He expressed this belief in almost all his letters to our mother, and repeatedly wrote that he hopes that soon everything will be over, and they will be together again.

Our father's last letter was written when he was told that that he would be leaving Pithiviers for an unknown destination. At that point, he probably knew the true meaning of such a journey, making this extremely moving letter his goodbye letter. This letter is so full of faith in *HaShem*, of love for our mother and his children, and of last-minute advice how my mother might save herself. Our father's belief in *HaShem* and his optimism are inspirational.

The correspondence between our parents became their living will to their children and all their descendants: Never lose hope and keep faith in *HaShem*. May we be worthy of their legacy.

The letters that follow are a small selection of the full correspondence between our parents. The letters that were not translated in this volume were scanned and shared with the collections of Yad vaShem. The letters in this volume were selected based on their meaningful content, as well as feasibility to read, decipher and translate accurately. Many of the letter were not dated at all; some of the dates were reconstructed based on the content and context of the letters.

June 1941

My Dear Olga,

I am very happy that I can write to you now. But I am even happier that I can receive news of you and of our dear children, whom I have not seen for so long. Finally! I am allowed to receive letters once a week, but only one sheet of letter paper, like this one. It must be sent in this size envelope and stamped with a postage stamp. Next time I will also send you a card that must be glued to the package that you can send me every other week. The package must be sent not registered, either by mail or rail (parcel post). It is forbidden to send anything that is rationed or food in tin cans. For example, jam in glass or in cardboard would be permitted, or in a metal box that is open. Also permitted is bread sliced into tartines, like sandwiches. Today we received a registration number so that mail and packages won't get lost. Mine is 1554. Write it down so as not to forget!

How are the children? Our oldest, little Yudith, how is she doing? She will soon be six. And the little twins, are they talking now? Our little daughter, Esther, is now a year and a half! And our youngest son, little Paul, how is he doing? Does he nurse well, and do you have enough milk? Don't make yourself sick, which could be bad for your health and that of our baby. I hope that the neighbors are people who understand you and help you with the necessary things for the children.

We now have the right to receive visits, but I don't want to make use of it, even though I do have the right to be first, as the father of five children. I can't take advantage of it, firstly, because you cannot leave the little ones, and also because the grief of every new parting far exceeds the few moments we're allowed. Please share your thoughts about this.

By means of the French Red Cross, I am sending you our children's naturalization documents. I hope these documents will serve you for my release.

Today I received your package containing a pair of socks, some cheese, sugar, eggs, and bread. I thank you very much. You must have gone to a lot of trouble to find all of this! In return, I will have to serve for a long time before I finish everything! On the other hand, I am very fearful that you and the children will be without me for now. I hope that *HaShem*, who has never abandoned us, will help us this time, too, so that we can be together again soon.

I am happy with the idea that I will soon receive your long letter full of details, and, while waiting for it, I embrace all of you very tightly.

Arthur



July 1941

My Dear Arthur,

I was overjoyed with your last letter. I thank you for your long letters. Forgive me that I do not answer you immediately, but, truly, I have so little time. I was happy to read that, *Baruch HaShem*, you are in good health. It is good that you can draw a bit, as that at least passes the time.

The children, *Baruch HaShem*, are doing very well and they look well. They take a walk for four hours every day and are already suntanned all over. Esther is especially dark and tanned, and she is very cute. She sings and has recently gained a pound. She calls every man "Papa" and wants to climb on his lap. You can see that she is thinking about you!

The two boys will soon be taller than me! They are talking a lot now. In the evening when they go to bed, they talk, and every time Henri says "*Gute Nacht*" (good night), they ask where you are, and then they answer on their own "In Pithiviers".

We celebrated our eldest daughter's birthday. Madam Falkenheim made a cake, I made them hot cocoa and everyone sat around the big table. There were flowers. Everything was very nice, but the thought that you are far from us makes me feel very sad. May *HaShem* enable us to celebrate the coming birthdays with more happiness. Someone wanted to give Yudit flowers, but she said that Mama doesn't want flowers in the house as long as Papa isn't there. She is very well behaved. She has really grown, and she is very wise.

I will also tell you something about Pauli. He is also growing very well; his crib has become too small and now he sleeps in a bed. Next Sunday he will be three months old. I am already giving him tomato juice, and, in another month, I will give him vegetables, too.

Imagine, Zelikovsky, too, has left, and soon no one will be left on Rue Cadet. Lily (my brother Icu's wife) is expecting her child any day.

You will forgive me that I sent your package only yesterday, but I have great difficulty finding enough items to send you. I hope that you are continuing to do well. I kiss you affectionately.

Olga



Monday, August 11, 1941

Dear Olga,

As you see, I arrived at about half-past nine. The commander smiled from ear to ear when he saw me. Indeed, no one doubted that I cannot arrive on a Saturday. Everything went fine, *Baruch HaShem*. By the afternoon, I had already drawn the portrait again. The commander told me that the camp will soon be closed, but I am not sure how reliable this is.

Valia was already here on Friday. He had been pretty sick at home, and once had to be transported by ambulance from his office to his house. Besides this, I do not know anything new.

The respect I enjoy has automatically increased due to the visit permit I had been given. I hope to be smarter than before ...

I think I forgot my *Siddur* and flashlight at home. The last one was probably taken out of my backpack by the kids!

I close with kisses.

Arthur



Friday, August 15, 1941

Dear Olga,

At the beginning of the week I wrote to you, and I hope you got it. I wrote that, *Baruch HaShem*, I arrived safely, and everything went fine.

This week was very interesting for me, because I drew my first color portraits, and succeeded! I was amazed at how quickly I understood how the painting was going. It began with an oil painting on my improvised easel, which went very well. Then I created an excellent easel in the carpentry shop, on which I drew several paintings and some pastel portraits that were really first class and, above all, free from the mistakes of all the previous works, which could not be seen from afar. *Baruch HaShem*, I'm pleased, and I hope to move on. I'll soon need more materials and pastel pencils, I'll send you a list with the address, so you can get things easier.

What are the dear children doing these days? I hope all is well. How are you, how do you manage to work? Are you still sad because of my absence? You will see that with *HaShem's* help, everything will end safely. I hope to get a letter from you soon, telling me about everything.

I kiss you and the dear ones with all my heart.

Arthur



August 19, 1941

My Dear Arthur,

I was already waiting impatiently for your letter and was very glad to learn that you arrived back safely. I am very sad that you have left after your visit here, but I hope that *HaShem* will help us see you here again soon, and under happier circumstances.

Things are all right in the house. As for me, I am working like an ant to save, with next winter in mind. I have not yet found any shoes, and that is causing me much concern because it is already raining often. The children will also need winter coats. All this could be arranged if you could come back!

Madam Simon has written to me. She is very happy with the portrait and asked me the price. I answered her that I don't know anything about it.

A woman from the Red Cross came and inquired about the Interior Ministry's response concerning your file. She has promised to intervene. I paid 500 francs to the manager.

I would very much like to send you something and am waiting for this to be permitted. I will spend whatever money is needed to get you everything that I can. Health comes before everything else.

Little Pauli is cute and simply quite adorable. He is very developed for his age, and he smiles at us like a very big person. It is impossible not to be charmed by him! You see that I would not be able to tell you which of your five little ones is the best looking or best behaved. I find them all charming!

As you see, for now everything is fine with us and I hope that it will continue this way with *HaShem*'s help. We are healthy and together. That's all we can wish for now.

We think a lot about you, and we send you our best wishes for the holidays.

Olga



September 1941

My Dear Arthur,

I received the two letters. I am very happy to know that you are doing well and that you can work.

Everything is going well with us. Our dear little son is growing and doing well. He is eating vegetables already for four weeks, and he eats them well. It is just very difficult to buy things now. Sometimes I am not far from despair, but *HaShem* protects us, and life continues.

I know that this news will make you sad, too: Cousin Árpád has been in a camp since August 20, and his mother-in-law has written me that it is impossible to visit him. I don't know whether she already knows what has happened or not. I so terribly want to help, but how? I have written his mother-in-law to let me know if she thinks I can be useful to her. Believe me, I am almost calmer because you are there. Isn't that a paradox? May *HaShem* help them.

Little by little everyone around me is going away. Everyone who was good is abandoning me. I live in terrible fear of remaining all alone, forever. I have never before felt the seriousness of the month of Elul and its sadness, as I do now. May *HaShem* have pity on us and on all of the Jews so that our life may be a little bit easier than it is now. I sent you the *selichot*. Next time I will send you the *machzorim*. Today I sent you everything you asked me for, and I hope that I arranged it well.

I was finally able to find high-top shoes for the two little boys. For little Esther I also bought a pair of white shoes. I spent 300 francs for the three pairs of shoes, but that's all right, because they should use them in good health. Yudit also got a shoe coupon, but I haven't found anything yet for her.

Believe me that I am always thinking about what I have to get for you, but it is just so very difficult now. I don't even know how one can get a blanket. I do not know if one can find anything good, and even if one finds one a good blanket, it would be very expensive.

Pay attention to yourself and your health.

I kiss you with much very much love.

Your Olga



September 1941

Dear Arthur,

I received your letter dated Sunday. I am glad that the package arrived safely. Please always give me details of what you receive. Tomorrow I will send you the *tallit* and *siddurim*.

My dear! How terrible this is! I was hoping until the last minute that you would come. I am so inexpressibly sad. May *HaShem* have pity on me so that I won't have to cry anymore, that my heart will be less full of anguish, and that we can be happy without bitterness.

My dear treasure! Sunday is *Rosh HaShanah*. I beg you to pray -- for yourself, for me, for our five little ones whom you have been forced to leave here, while you must remain in the camp without us and far from us during the holidays. May all this be for the best, and may *HaShem* accept our prayers, and may this be the last year passed in sadness. May the times to come be full of peace and carefree happiness. May we never again be required to leave you, and may we always be together to rejoice together with the children for a very, very long time.

The children are adorable. The two boys speak only French between themselves and each one wants the exact same thing as his brother. Georges says, "Like Henri." Our youngest boy is already eating semolina with milk! You will find my little man perfect, when *zu guten* ("for the best") you come back.

Now I am only sending you the oil that you asked for, and perhaps some cheese. I beg you to always write me when you need something, and I will send it to you as soon as I can. Whatever you can buy there, you should definitely do so. Now that the cold weather is beginning, it is especially important that you eat well (as much as possible). Pay attention to yourself, my dear, and do not forget that you have to return to me and your children, safe and sound.

Don't be too sad, my dear, and always think that in the end, everything will truly be fine. *Gut Yumtiff* (חג שמח)!

We all embrace you with all our heart and with much love.

Your Olga



September 1941

Dear Arthur,

I received your two letters from Sunday and am very happy to know that the packages arrived so soon. It's comforting that the packages arrived so quickly, in twenty-four hours from the station. Only, unfortunately, I cannot send you as I would like to. I had wanted to send you a package on Monday, but I still didn't have the least idea of what I would put inside it because, unfortunately, it is difficult to get anything. Now in my prayers, I ask *HaShem* for one thing: that life not be so hard, that I have physical strength, and that I should be able to handle my difficult situation. Don't be angry with me, my dear. It certainly isn't very nice on my part to write you this way, but today I am especially tired.

The most important thing is that we are all in good health. Our dear little ones are looking well, and they are very sweet. Estherke has grown a little more than a kilo. She is extremely wise and intelligent. She knows exactly what she wants and what she doesn't want, and it is difficult to convince her otherwise. She talks a lot and chatters the whole day "Estherke is cute. Estherke is beautiful," and so on. This is how she talks to herself. She is truly unique.

I want to write you more about little Pauli. You have to see how cute he is! He always wants to sit, laughs at everyone, and refuses to sleep on his back (on principle, it seems to me!). He is good and sweet like an angel. From all this you can see that I also love my Number Five!

There is still no news of (Cousin) Arpad, but Ginette (his wife) will probably come back next week.

Would it be possible for you to write more often? I thank you for the letters.

May *HaShem* make everything be for the best. I wish you an easy fast. Pay attention to yourself. I imagine that you will lead the prayers for the others on Yom Kippur. May *HaShem* have pity on us, and may we be able to see you again soon, safe and sound.

We embrace you with all our heart,

Olga



Motzai Shabbat, October 4, 1941

Dear Arthur,

I didn't receive mail from you today, and hope that everything is all right with you. I beg you very much to write to me every time it is possible. Pay close attention to yourself, my dear! I know that the mornings and nights are already very cold where you are. Aren't you cold? I asked Jean for a blanket and he promised to send me one, but everything takes a long time for them.

Don't be angry with me, I beg you. It is so difficult to get anything, and it is so complicated to send a package. This is why I am telling you again to buy whatever you can there, not to worry about the price demanded, and not to feel bad if you spend a lot. It is more important than anything that you remain in good health for us, for your family. If you can't send us any money, it doesn't matter, as we can manage without it.

Baruch HaShem, *Yom Kippur* passed. I hope that *HaShem* will have pity on us, and that we and our dear children will be given a happy life with you, all of us always together, for 120 years. It is almost a miracle how easy it was for me to fast, and I didn't even have a headache. Various people tried to dissuade me from fasting because I am nursing. I reassured them that for years I have had experience, given the fact that over the years, if I don't fast while nursing, something else happens. Isn't that the case?



October 1941

On Friday, October 3, our daughter went to school for the first time! My poor little one was sound asleep when I woke her up in the morning, but she went off quite willingly and came back in a good mood. Her only complaint was that "I spent the whole day in school and I still can't read and write." She also reported that "You know, Mama, there are also very small girls in my class." I think she is the oldest one. May *HaShem* keep her in good health, and also our other little ones. Yesterday Dr. Solomon came. He isn't very happy with the little boy once again... an old story. I hope that you understand what I mean ...

Yudith knows very well that your birthday will be on *Simchas Torah* and she would really like you to come back by then.

I don't know if I wrote you that I bought a carriage with a seat for Estherke, so now, *Baruch HaShem*, all five of us can take a walk. It's a real expedition, and you can imagine how everyone looks at them! I am very proud of them.

I am getting your letters. In the next package I will send the things that you asked for. Write me all about yourself, and stay in good health!

Happy holidays and best wishes. We all send you hugs.

Your Olga



Tuesday evening, October 7, 1941 (*Motzai Yomtov*)

Dear Olga,

We have a beautiful *Sukkah* here and the weather is good.

I waited for the letter from you, because I think a lot about you, and I hope you have already sent it. How are you and my dear children? I wish *ad 120* and *Mazal Tov* to my beloved Yitzchakel and beloved Chaimke for their third birthdays. May they always be healthy and give us *nachat*. I'm looking forward to my birthday, too.

I suspect that you sent me a package last week. If that's the case, please go to complain with the receipt at the postal branch where you sent it, because it did not arrive. Hopefully it didn't contain important things or equipment for the last painting. In any event, I would like you to send me drawing paper quickly, and also jam, if you have.

The last time I wrote you was after *Yom Kippur*. I hope you got it. Now I have to finish.

I kiss you and the dear children with all my heart.

Arthur



October 7, 1941

My Dear Arthur

Tomorrow I will write you again. Perhaps you will receive it before this one. I would like to write a lot and talk to you about everything, but I am very tired and I can no longer stay awake easily.

You are right. My duties are not easy, and I have to struggle hard. May *HaShem* give me strength to handle all of this. It could still be worse.

The bureaucratic procedures are so complicated for even the tiniest thing! For example, if I want to be signed up for something, I must bring all my documents. I am exaggerating a little, but all of this is extra, stressful work, especially when I can no longer feel my legs.

It is not very nice of me to complain to you, because, unfortunately, you cannot help me.

Yesterday evening Madam Falkenheim left. I cried a lot. She is a very good woman, very kind. May *HaShem* give her much *mazel* so she can live happily with her family.

I want to also tell you pleasant things: I had Esterke weighed. She has grown nearly 800 grams in four weeks! You can imagine how happy I am.

I don't know whether I've already told you that I bought a stove for the front room. It has already been installed today. Do you remember how cold we were last year? How fine it would be to be together with you, next to the crackling fire in the stove! Here the evenings and the mornings are already cold. If only I had a little coal, I would heat a little ... but I hope I will have everything in its time.

I hope that you are in good health and that you are taking care of yourself. I am really afraid that your suit is ruined again and full of holes. I ask everyone if they have a spare suit, but now people think a lot before giving such presents. Couldn't you do something? I'm so worried about you, my dear. The thought of the extreme cold that is coming, and that your suit is full of holes! Life is hard, my dear, and sometimes one wonders "Why? For what?"

I thought about you a lot on Tuesday, your birthday. Are you healthy? I asked *HaShem* to allow us to always celebrate your birthday in happiness and good health, together with our dear children, until 120.

The boys have started their fourth year, *Baruch HaShem*. They were happy to receive their birthday present, but it was really nothing special. They are so cute when they talk. They were very proud of their birthday! "What's today?", I asked our little ones. "*Burstag*" (Birthday). "How old are you now?" "Three". As you see, they are still not speaking much, but they are very cute!

Your big daughter still likes going to school, only she is very sleepy, the poor little one, when I wake her up in the morning. For her, too, my poor little darling, life goes on. She can't do what she would like to anymore.

I sent a package on *Erev Yom Kippur*, but unfortunately, you did not receive it. I submitted a claim here, and they told me that it might be in Pithiviers. I am very afraid that it isn't anywhere now. I am very sorry, because the package contained a kilo of jam, and it is very difficult to get more now.

I leave you, my beloved, and send you hugs from me and the children.

Your Olga



October 1941

My Dear Arthur

I didn't want to write you so late, but because of the holidays I am running behind with all my work, and sometimes I am snowed under so much that I don't even know where to begin.

I received your letter of the 21st. I am glad to know that you received the package. I will send you another one next Monday, only, unfortunately, there isn't much that I can buy.

Estherke asks "Where is Papa?". "In Pithiviers," answers the little blond boy. But Estherke asks again. Then Chaimke gets angry and says, "We already told you." Then they hit each other or play quietly (depending on the case), as if the two of them weren't born a day apart!

Dear Yudit is going to school quite willingly, but she still has trouble getting up in the morning and I am quite afraid that it will get worse when it gets really cold. The teacher examines the girls' hands every day and when they have clean hands, they receive a little picture as a prize at noon. Naturally, your daughter is eager, and as soon as she has a minute free, she washes her hands.

I already wrote you that I had a small stove installed in our front room. I have already lit it sometimes, and I use very little coal. It still gets warm immediately, and because the pipe passes through the kitchen, I have warm air there also. Unfortunately, I don't have much coal -- only the few bags that I got with Pauli's card. I am very upset about this. It is cold, and one has to heat the house, but I have been promised coal only for November. What do you think? Could I ask for some at the *shul*? I haven't asked them for any money. For the moment, everything is all right with my finances.

What are you doing now, paintings in pastels or oils? I would so like to see one of your oil paintings! Are you happy with your work? Are the others?

I want to tell you that I go to bed by myself every evening and I'm doing much better opening the folding bed than you used to! I don't understand why it was such an effort for you! You will not believe how handy I am around the house! You will value me even more.

Pay attention to your health.

Your Olga



Monday, October 27, 1941

My Dear Olga,

This afternoon, a high-ranking officer called me to his office and showed me your letters. He then said he trusted me and gave me the letter. I explained to him how complicated writing was for you. By the way, he is a very nice person, and we talked for half an hour. He was friendly and gave me great compliments. But the biggest order I got yesterday was that I must paint a large portrait of the camp commander, the captain. HaShem should help me with this.

Since the inspections began, it is difficult to send letters. I'll try to give this letter to the officer who was kind to me. I was very happy to receive your letter, and I am glad that you are not losing faith. Believe me that HaShem will not leave us, and, at the right time, everything will be good.

I must check the book of accounts and payments that have been paid to me (at least 800 francs) and submit the document. I hope that they will be a little more understanding now. I also hope you already have this invoice. If you do not, then you must call every day. The president of the Jewish community speaks German. Maybe you can write Fishel to take care of it urgently,

I need more supplies from stores on Pavg. St. Antoine. Please get brushes and linseed oil. I am attaching an accurate painting of the original size of the brushes. I also need white paint and varnish for oil paintings.

I'll try to get permission for you to write me letters in German. I hope to get some good news soon.

I send you and the dear ones warm regards, and kiss you all with all my heart.

Arthur



November 3, 1941

Dear Olga,

Yesterday I sent you my letter, and today I got your second letter. You're right to accuse me of writing too briefly, while you, who have much less time than I, write me long letters which give me great pleasure. Truthfully, I cannot write much from here, because besides my work, nothing happens here. Also, I was always a bad writer.

I'm glad to hear that my dear Pauli feels better, however, what you wrote about you worries me and I hope it's already passed. As far as shoes, I checked here, but it's hard to get any shoes, and I don't know what size shoes the children need.

Today I sent a package with three cakes and two packages of cheese. I hope it will arrive soon. Please let me know, and then I can send the other things as well.

What you wrote about dear Yudit having a very gentle soul touched me deeply, and I am very proud of her. I began to write her a fairy tale, but in the meantime, she will have to settle with the cakes. When do you believe you can go to an expert for her ears? What's going on with school now?

I drew Mr. Glass's portrait again, and he should take it to Paris one of these days. It would be good if you could look at it. Right now it's very cold, which is not very conducive for my work. I started painting Mr. Zangen, but I do not think you should tell his wife.

If Golda arrives, she should send me some packages of Chanukah candles, if she has any.

There is nothing else interesting to tell you. Thank you very much for your detailed letters.

I send you and the dear ones warm regards, and kiss you all with all my heart.

Arthur



Monday, December 8, 1941

Dear Olga,

I received your precious letter yesterday, along with the tickets. I was very happy that the package arrived, and I hope that the package I sent today will soon arrive with *HaShem's* help. You do not have to worry about my food situation as, *Baruch HaShem*, I have enough to eat. There's no need to send me so many coupons because I manage fine with the daily allowance.

I am glad that dear Pauli is already feeling better. As for Yudit, the disease is called "*fulltögnlladas*" (ear infection) and it is not dangerous at all, but it requires treatment. It's not a hereditary disease.

Did the package from Mr. Bouchard come?

You do not have to worry about the cold here, as I'm not suffering from it.

On Sunday, the exhibition opened here, and the large picture that I painted of the commander is on display. Of course, it received great applause!

I am sending you 300 francs through Mr. Dubinsky who will pay you a visit one of these days. I beg you not to save it, because that's not the right thing to do!

Please do not be sorry that I write such dry letters, as it's hard to write anything else. I am very grateful to *HaShem* that I have you as my wife because you are so brave. It cannot take much longer now, and we must believe in *HaShem* that everything will be good.

Have you already written to dear Joe that I am very pleased with the blanket?

Write to me soon. I bless and kiss you and the dear children with all my heart.

Arthur



Sunday evening, December 14, 1941 (*Erev Chanukah*)

Dear Olga,

I received your precious letter yesterday and I was very happy to read that *Baruch HaShem* everything is fine.

Mr. Dubinsky arrived on Friday evening, and told me about the dear children, so I am very pleased. I hope that Judith's ear is healing.

Today is *Erev Chanukah*. I hope you remember and will light the candles for the children. Here I am lighting a *menorah* with oil. I thought that maybe you could send me some candles through Golda, or maybe a full package? Please do not forget the patches for the suit, and maybe also a shirt with a collar. Tomorrow I hope that I will be able to send you a package that will replace my absence to a certain extent during *Chanukah* and on the birthday of dear Estherka, who should be well. We should only have nachat from her.

You do not have to be too upset that I am missing now. With *HaShem's* help, we will overcome everything, and all the evil will be broken. ... The main thing is that we stay healthy and that I should be able to return at the right time.

I am going to get one of my works this week in the city, *Be'Ezrat HaShem*, so I will be out a few times.

Send my heartiest greetings to dear Arpad and tell him that I do not believe it will last longer than the summer, and that I hope I can return home sooner.



Monday, December 15, 1941

I am back in the city today, Monday afternoon. The newspapers do not bring good news, but hopefully *HaShem* will have mercy on us and guard against anything bad.

Mr. Bouchard will send some butter and cheese one of these days.

Write me again soon.

From the heart,

Arthur



Winter 1942

Dear Olga,

I received your first letter from Tuesday, as well as the last letter and the tickets. I am sorry if I caused you a nuisance. Please remember that I do not always have the opportunity to deliver my letters in such a way that they leave immediately, so my letters reach you in delay. Also, the workday is very short, and in the evening, we *daven* (pray), eat and then immediately peel vegetables. When we finish, they turn off the lights and we sit for hours in the dark. We have not received batteries for months, so a candle would serve me well.

I'm busy all day. Printing and paintbrushes cost me about 1200 francs. I sell one page at 12 francs. Right now, I have about 200 units and I hope to earn well with *HaShem's* help.

I hope to be able send you something soon, maybe from the village. Unfortunately, I can barely send food, as it is prohibited. We are also only allowed to send small packages of up to 3 kg (Please send me small boxes, as I do not have any!). It seems that the most expensive package I sent you got lost.

Please do not be angry that I only write a little. I must work a lot and take advantage of every opportunity.

I hope everything is fine, and I bless and kiss you and the dear children with all my heart.

Arthur



Winter 1942

Dear Olga,

I received your letter from Tuesday, and I am very happy, *Baruch HaShem*, to hear that everything is all right. *Hashem* needs to continue to help. It is very unfortunate that I can't help you with the potatoes. The authorities have forbidden to send potatoes to Paris and those who do, face heavy punishment.

As far as what people tell you that this or that will happen, don't let this hurt your courage. I have no doubt that everything will be all right! As for my visiting permit, it is not easy to arrange, but I do not give up hope that all will be for the best. Pessimistic people do not understand anything, but we believe that *Hashem* will help at the right time.

I think about our dear Pauli who is trying to stand up these days, and I can imagine how the dear children enjoy watching him.

These days I tried to draw an oil painting from a photograph for the first time. The photo is from the late director of the local sugar factory. This is much harder than drawing an actual person, but it is good enough.

There is nothing else new.

I send you and the dear ones warm regards, and kiss you all with all my heart.

Arthur



Winter 1942

Dear Olga,

Do not worry too much! You'll see that everything will work out with *HaShem's* help. After all, you are not the only one who needs it.

How I would like to come! Today I asked the captain again, but he will not let me. Apparently, that's how it should be, but we'll wait and see about that as well.

Are our dear children behaving well? Is dear Yuditke upset with the situation? Try as much as possible to make things trivial, which of course is difficult, especially since you are very scared.

Please write to me often. I need your letters very much.

I send you and the dear ones warm regards, and kiss you all with all my heart.



March 1942

Dear Olga,

How are the dear children? Are they all already vaccinated? What's new on Cadet Street? Is Golda still coming to you?

As far as the matzot, you do not have to worry about whether you will have. I'm sure that this will be solved, and the kids will eat. There are enough people to take care of it. Here, too, we will receive matza. Do not forget next Shabbat to bentch (bless) Rosh Chodesh. Make time for this.

How are Madam Shmulevich and Madam Rachnitzer? What do you hear about Madam Falkenheim?

Do the boys already say "Modeh Ani"? They are supposed to say a brachah on the tzitzit when they wear their Talit.

What about potatoes, do you need them urgently?

Write to me often.

I bless and kiss you and the dear ones with all my heart,

Arthur



March 1942

Dear Olga,

It's already Friday. For ten days I've been waiting for news of you and I am very worried. I hope to have a letter tomorrow that will explain why you haven't written me. I think about you and our little ones very often, and I'm often with you in my dreams.

For the last week I have been working more successfully than in the winter months, and I am satisfied with my work.

The day before yesterday, I had a pleasant surprise. Among the drawing paper you sent me recently, I found the unfinished portrait of our Yudith, which I made when I last visited you all. It was surely by chance that you sent it with the paper. Perhaps I will try to finish this pastel portrait from memory.

There isn't anything new here. I hope I will be reassured tomorrow with news from you. Please take all my love and my best kisses,

Your Arthur



March 1942

Dear Olga,

I was very happy to hear that Nancy and her husband were well, *Baruch HaShem*. It must be terrible there. Unfortunately, as I hear today, there a lot of sirens in Paris. We must endure all these difficulties and we should not lose our faith. Very unpleasant. I have confidence constantly that HaShem will save us before the first or second day of *Pesach*! Until then, we must bite our teeth and wait. Then we will get priority with *HaShem*!

Do not be afraid of anything, as everything will be all right. Even if they take the vouchers, or they act disgustingly to us, remember that their days are numbered. Pray only to *HaShem* to protect us and give us health and keep us safe.

Arthur



Sunday, April 5, 1942 (*Pesach*)

Dear Olga,

I received your letters of April 1 and 2. It was high time, because I was already starting to be worried, having gone eight days without any news of you! I was glad to read that you are not angry with me about the disappointment I caused you. I was with you in thought and in dream.

You are absolutely right that the most important thing is that, *Baruch HaShem*, we are able to celebrate *Pesach* in good health, even though we are apart. Thus far, the holiday has gone well, and we observed both *Seders* just as they should be. I hope that I will soon be able to read your letter telling me how you spent *Pesach*.

I am afraid that one of your letters has been lost, so I don't know if my packages arrived safely and if the shoes fit the little ones. Here there is enough food and it is sufficient, but I beg you to send me two kilograms of *matzah* so that I can return it, because I had to borrow some. I beg you to send your letters by registered mail so that I will be sure to receive them.

Unfortunately, the few privileges I enjoyed, such as going to town, etc., have been canceled for now. I hope to get them back soon.

I am going to end ...



May 18, 1942

My Dear Arthur,

Here everything is going well, only the days are very long for me, and waiting is so difficult. Regarding your letter: I am very sad and I pray a lot for the day when we will be reunited. I am afraid that I won't be brave for long. I hope that you have already received the photos which I sent you in the package with the canvas.

I would like to send the children to the country with Madam Fessaux. I am going to stay home with little Paul, and I hope that being alone with him will give me a chance to rest and get stronger.

Everything is the same with us. We are waiting for your letter.

I kiss you many times,

Your Olga



June 1942

My Dear Arthur,

I am very uneasy because on Saturday I didn't receive your letter. It is already eight days since the last time! I hope that you are in good health and safe. Rumors are that people are being sent to the countryside to work the land. Is that true?

I sent you a package containing socks, a short-sleeved shirt, a warm shirt, and a pack of cigarettes. I hope that you are happy with the black socks.

Here everything is the same as always. Everything is fine. Yudit thinks about you a lot and very much wants Papa to come back for her birthday. It's all very sweet. Everyone loves Little Estherke, because she is very sweet.

I received canvas for portraits, five times 40×50, I will send them next. I hope that I will go to the post office tomorrow to mail it to you.

I kiss you many times.

Your Olga



July 1942

My Dear Olga,

I received your letter of Tuesday and I am very happy that, *Baruch HaShem*, everything is fine with you. I am sorry that I could not be with you for our dear Yudit's birthday. Let us hope that in the future we will be able to celebrate birthday parties together. I wish Yudit that she should soon be able to embrace her father. I am very happy that my big girl is already seven years old and I hope that she will always be very wise.

I received your package intact and am grateful to you for all the marvelous things. It isn't necessary for you to deprive yourself of these things!

Among the people who have arrived here from Caux de Bonne, I found a Mr. Fischer, a brother of the wife of Marci Gaysel (she died two years ago) who knows our family.

Today I sent you a package containing a large number of copies of drawings that I made in the winter. I had so many left and I don't have any place to keep them. I also put inside a sketch of me (rather poor) but I hope you will find it interesting all the same.

Has Madam Shmulevich, the neighbor, received any news of her husband yet? From where?

The supplies (oil and white pigment) have not arrived and it's necessary to go claim them at the post office. I did receive the twelve stamps and am using them today. I am still working a little. I don't need any fixing agent because I inherited some at the last departure. I have not received the paper sample. As for the canvas, it isn't urgent.

I hope to have news from you soon.

I embrace you and our dear little ones with all my heart.

Your Arthur



THE LAST LETTER

July 1942

My Dear Olga,

Now I must tell you that I am going with all my friends. Please do not be too sad about this because *HaShem* is everywhere.

Please believe with boundless faith in *HaShem* who accompanies us and will save us. We must live at all costs! I'm sure we'll be separated for a short time. Do not forget what I've already written to you: By *Rosh Hashanah* everything will work out. Whatever happens, do not lose hope! Now that we feel the worst, *HaShem's* help is very close.

Do not forget that on your identity card you are registered as "Hungarian". This will be very important now. It is also important now that women continue to be strong. Our love and faith will preserve our bitter fate and our lives will continue even happier than before!

Ma chere (my dear) Olga! The children are our guarantors. I ask *Hashem* that you should be able to stay with the children until I come back, and if not, if you must leave them (which is now possible), do not be afraid and believe in *Hashem*. You'll see that we will meet again, and everything will work out.

Be strong. I kiss you and our little darlings with all my heart. I'm sure I'll come back.

Your Arthur



Ma chère Olga ^{Je t'embrasse}
Maintenant il faut, que je te
previenne que je dois partir
avec tout mes camarades.
Je te prie ne pas être trop
trist à cause de ça parce que
notre Dieu est partout. Je
te prie pour avoir ~~ta~~ confiance
confiancee inlimité a notre
Dieu qui nous sauvera. Il faut
que nous vivions ~~de~~ a tout
jours. Je suis sûr que notre
séparation ne sera qu pour
un court temps. Ne oublie
pas ça que j'ai ~~te~~ écrit autrefois
que jusqu'en Roch hashon on
tout va se arrange'. Ne importe
quoi qu'il arrive ne perds pas
ton confiance. Quand on se
croit le plus misérable c'est
le secours de l'Éd. tout près.

Ne oubliez pas que sur ton Carte
d'identité est marquée ton nationalité
hongroise, c'est maintenant
très importante. Aussi les frères
il faut que il ne perdent leur
courage. Notre Annonciation comme notre
foi. Surviendra notre misère actuelle
et notre vie continuera plus heureuse
qu'avant, ~~Ma chère Olga~~
Nos enfants ils sont nos garants
je prie a l'Éd. que tu peux rester
avec eux jusqu'à je reviens. Si
non, si tu seras obligé les quitter
(ça est maintenant possible) que
pas pour et tout et vive même
seule et avec confiance a notre
D. Tu verras nous nous retrouvons
et que tout s'arrangera.
Reste fort, j'en suis sûr de
tout mon cœur et mon chère
petite je suis sûr que je reviens
ton Arthur
pour jamais.

Ça va te renvoyer de valise
avec les grands camarades
de Jean et mon complet.
Je te renvoie en outre
un petit colis avec des aliments
et beaucoup plus.

Arthur Weisz's last letter, July 1942, Pithiviers, France

Life in the Pithiviers Camp

May 1941 – June/July 1942

by Claude Ungar

Extract from the Petit Cahier N ° 17: "The Rafle" of the Green Ticket, May 14, 1941,
and from the opening of The Internment camps of Loiret (pages 36 to 41);
Deportation and Shoah Study Circle Edition, 2012;
House Associations, 8 rue du General Renault, 75011 Paris



Arthur Weisz produced a significant amount of artwork while at the Pithiviers camp. I found traces of fifteen portraits of his comrades of misfortune in Pithiviers.

Weisz also engraved this poster, entitled *Chez les hébergés au Camp de Pithiviers* ("Among those being hosted at the Pithiviers Camp"), and printed it, most likely, at a printer in the city. The drawings are very rich in details, which represent and convey many themes and messages

The title of this poster may seem curious, but in fact it is a wicked nod to the camp authorities. In the eyes of the administration, the men in the drawing are neither internees, prisoners, nor detainees. They are being "hosted"! This "hosting" status is also mentioned on the certificates of attendance at the camp, on the tickets authorizing visits, and on the registries. This term was already used in internment camps in the so-called free zone. The irony and ambiguity of the term "hosting" is striking: Usually "hosting" conveys sheltering, lodging, and welcoming! In the case of the internees at Pithiviers, however, Arthur Weisz chose to derisively and ironically title his drawing *Chez les hébergés*.

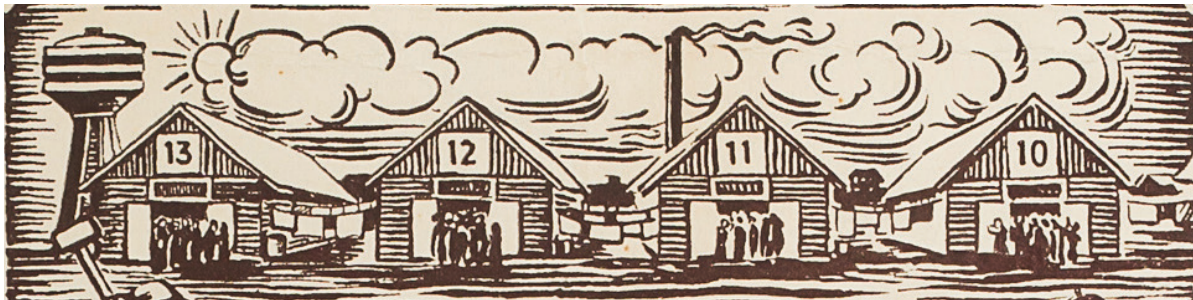
In the central cartouche, there is space to handwrite the name of the internee, his house and his number, thereby customizing the poster for each internee. These identifying details were required on all envelopes and parcels intended for those "housed" at Pithiviers. The drawing also includes the date on which the internees were arrested, May 14, 1941.

In museums and through contact with families of internees, I found more than twenty similar posters with different names, all of which were drawn by Arthur Weisz.

At first glance, the style of the drawing is similar to comic books, which are generally aimed at young readers. However, this drawing is full of figurative details and many profound messages. For example, the edge of the placard, the frame of the drawing, is none other than a barbed wire fence, highlighting (as if necessary!) the confinement of those "hosted" in the Pithiviers camp.

I cut out several sections of the poster and compared the details of each section with photos from the same era. This comparison enhances our appreciation of the many subtle messages that Arthur Weisz embedded in his poster.

Starting from the top of the drawing and counterclockwise, we see a row of barracks, with laundry hanging on lines stretched from one hut to the other. In the background there is a water tower and a large fireplace. At the 2008 exhibition at CERCIL (The Study and Research Center on the Internment Camps in Loiret, located in Orleans, France) in which many of these posters were shown, some people suggested that the chimney might be a premonitory vision of the crematoria of Auschwitz. In fact, it is only the chimney of the sugar refinery near the camp, at which a few dozen men from Pithiviers worked during the fall of 1941.



The drawing shows smoke coming out of the chimney, which suggests the possibility that the wind will chase away the clouds and the sun will reappear. Arthur Weisz may have intended this as a message of optimism and reassurance for the internees' families who remained in Paris.



The scene in the poster shows internees performing agricultural work. In the photo we also see internees working the soil and growing vegetables, which would supplement the basic menu. Some internees voluntarily worked in surrounding farms or further away in Sologne. *Gendarmes* were assigned to supervise and watch these men.

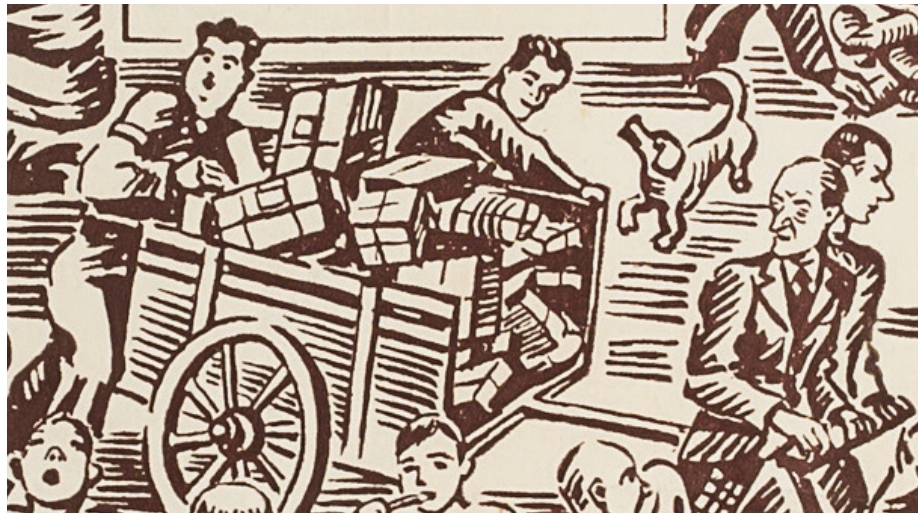


The men in Pithiviers worked in many different labors. Inside the camp they worked in the kitchens, maintained the buildings, and drained the soil. Outside the camp, under the supervision of *gendarmes*, internees worked on various tasks, including roadwork.



The camp was guarded by a hundred *gendarmes*. Rather than symbolize this authority in the form of a policeman armed with a rifle, Arthur Weisz included an image of the policeman with a bugle, used for sounding the alarm clock.

What image could better illustrate the Pithiviers camp guarded by a French policeman than this photo made famous by Alain Resnay's documentary film *"Night and Fog"* (1955)? In the film, the *gendarme* was erased in order to satisfy the censor, thereby allowing the film's release.



The poster depicts a cart filled with parcels that relatives had sent to the internees. Like the men in the photograph, Weisz's men are dressed in city garb in order to cross Pithiviers and go to the station. Similar carts were also used to leave the camp and look for food and firewood.



There were various water points around the camp grounds, including collective sinks outside the barracks, as depicted in this image. The inmates also had the opportunity to shower once a week.



The small dog included in the poster drawings is not insignificant, and may even provide reassurance. Dogs often climbed under the barbed wire into the camp and were “adopted” by the internees. Since these posters were also intended for the children of the internees who remained in Paris, Arthur Weisz may have included the dog to present a sense of normalcy in the camp. Several photographs from the time also show dogs in internment camps.

When I showed the poster to Georges, one of Arthur Weisz's sons, he pointed out to me that his father had also drawn himself on this placard. Weisz is recognizable by his goatee, as seen on his self-portrait above. In our poster, Weisz dressed himself in a beret, stereotypical of French artists.



Arthur Weisz, like some of his colleagues, painted many portraits of Jews interned at Pithiviers. Other artists drew portraits of women and children from photographs, instead of with live subjects, as is the case of the anonymous artist in the photograph.

This image shows the large pots in which food was brought to the barracks. In the contemporaneous photo, we see the chef of the Pithiviers camp, Israel Wolkensztejn, surrounded by the kitchen staff. Wolkensztejn was a colorful character and was greatly appreciated by the internees. He was deported to Auschwitz and survived.



The works of art created by Arthur Weisz and his fellow artists, as well as the hundreds of photos taken by the internees in Pithiviers and other Loiret camps, provide a glimpse into daily life in the camps. These photographs and artwork complement and enrich each other and deserve the attention and study of both historians and relatives of the internees.

Artists, as well as many others in the camps, left testimony to their experiences during their long stay in Pithiviers. They also conveyed messages of affection to their loved ones and offered them reassurance and hope. The internees in the camps did not know the fate of their wives and children. Those who were arrested during the roundups of July 16-17, 1942, would be interned in these same camps, but with much harsher conditions. They suffered from hunger, lack of hygiene, crowding, and brutality of the *gendarmes*, before being deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Story of Herzl's Coffin Drape (*Parochet*)

by Georges Yitzhak Weisz

הנה אני פתח את קברותיכם
והעליתי אתכם מקברותיכם עמי
והבאתי אתכם אל אדמת ישראל
הזרעים בדמעה ברנה יקצרו



בשחרותי שתחדר העולם
בעשרת העשר ובגדלותי יוסף גם
הוא גדולה ואשר אנתו מנסים לעשות
שם לטובתו פעל פעלה חזקה ודבת
ברכה לטובת האנושות כלה

נשיא מדינת ישראל לכהן המצוינות אחד במזן ואב ודצ
לומר העלאת עצמותו לרצון שנת דצ

Herzl's Coffin Drape (Parochet)

Thursday, December 14, 2005, was without a doubt one of the most important days of my life. It was a winter day in Jerusalem, bathed in sunlight. I went to my clinic. Because I had a few minutes left until I had to start work, I went into a used bookstore that I frequent. My gaze wandered across the shelves overflowing with books, and suddenly halted on an old poster, in a glass frame. It was the front page of *Haaretz* from August 17, 1949. The banner headline proclaimed: "*Remains of Dr. Theodor Herzl Brought to Israel*".

Theodor Herzl, the prophet of the State, had often expressed his desire to be buried in a metal coffin, so that, when the time came, it would be possible to transfer his bones to the Land of Israel. One of the first decisions made by David Ben-Gurion as prime minister was to fulfill this wish.

Now, in the Jerusalem bookstore, I saw at the bottom of the framed page, a photograph of the cloth that draped Herzl's coffin when it arrived at the airport in Lod. Made of velvet, a rectangle some four meters long and two meters wide, it was divided into three sections horizontally. Texts were embroidered on two of them, while the central section was decorated with symbols that had been dear to Herzl's heart – the Star of David, the lion of Judah, and the seven stars symbolizing the seven-hour workday. Embroidered on the upper part of the cloth was a verse from Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones: "I will open your graves and lift you out of your graves, My people, and bring you to the Land of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:12). On the bottom section was the close of Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State):

The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness.
And whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare, will react powerfully and
beneficially for the good of humanity.

These two texts express the essence of Herzl's being, the Jew and the universalist.

One detail that the *Haaretz* journalist noted left me rooted in place: he wrote that the coffin drape had been made in Vienna in 1936. Not in 1949, as I expected, but thirteen years earlier! My mother, who passed away in March 1983, had told me that my father, Arthur Weisz, was involved in designing the drape for Herzl's coffin. At the time I thought she must be mistaken, for I knew for certain that my father was murdered in Auschwitz in 1942, which would have made it impossible for him to have been involved in this project in 1949. I discounted my mother's words (which I regret today, of course) and eventually forgot them altogether.

During the many years of research in libraries and the Zionist archives that went into the writing of my book *Herzl: A New Reading*, I had never once thought of the story of the coffin drape. And here I was, reading from a framed page of *Ha'aretz*, that the drape was made in 1936, and not in 1949!

It turns out that at the Nineteenth Zionist Congress in 1935, it was decided that Herzl's remains would be brought to the Land of Israel within a year, no later than 1936. At the time, my father was already living in Vienna, where he had moved several years earlier from his birthplace in Czechoslovakia. By that time, he had completed his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and resumed his studies in Vienna and later in Paris. My father was one of the most talented Judaica artists at the time. It would, therefore, not be surprising for the Zionist Organization – in this case the WIZO, the Women's Zionist Organization – to commission him to design the cloth that would drape Herzl's coffin en-route to burial in the Land of Israel.

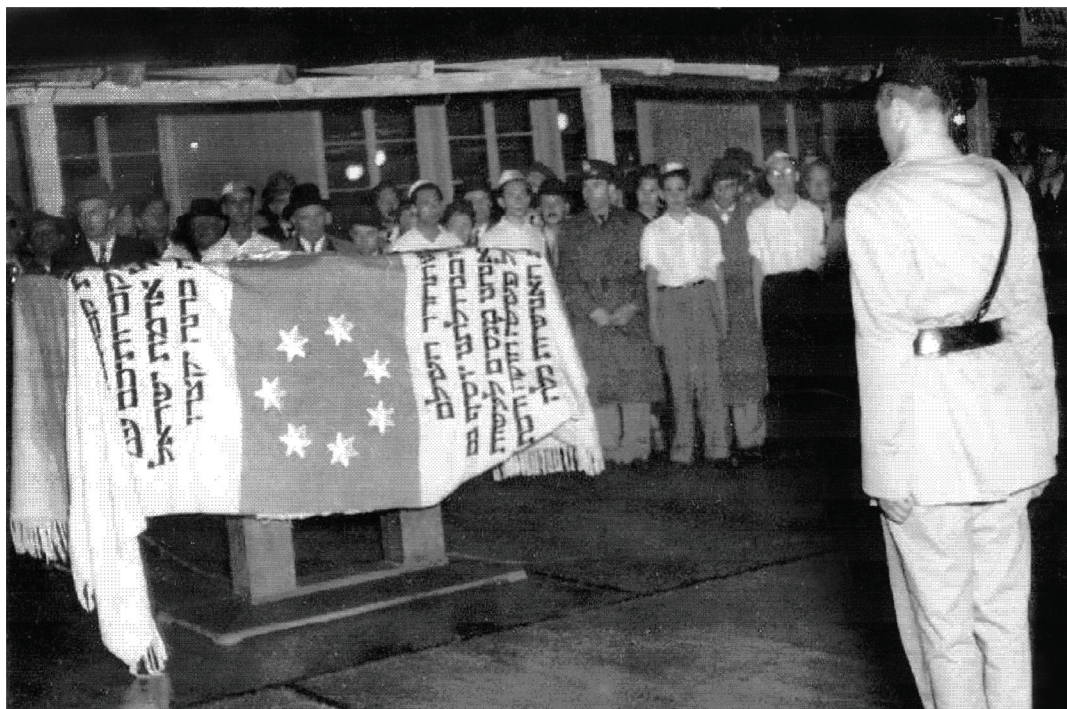
This sequence of events suddenly seemed quite plausible, but I still lacked proof. I rushed to the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem in the hope of finding some additional information. I asked to see the files pertaining to the transfer of Herzl's remains to Israel, with all the documents from 1935 to 1949. There were hundreds of pages and sifting through them was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Nonetheless, I began to read, page after page, though increasingly succumbing to despair. But then I suddenly encountered a document from 1937 (CZA, S/10.426), with details of the cloth that would drape the coffin. The letters began to dance before my eyes as I read that the overall design had been assigned to the architect Oskar Strand, and the realization of his sketch had been confided to the artist, Arthur Weisz – my father! And so, my eight-year journey tracing Herzl's footsteps led me to uncover the mysterious bond between me and my father, whom I never knew.

The cloth mysteriously disappeared after the ceremony of Herzl's burial on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in August 1949. In photographs and movies from the burial ceremony, it is clear that when the coffin was lowered into the grave, the coffin drape was removed, and not buried with Herzl's bones. The cloth mysteriously disappeared after the ceremony of Herzl's burial on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in August 1949. In photographs and movies from the burial ceremony, it is clear that when the coffin was lowered into the grave, the coffin drape was removed, and not buried with Herzl's bones. According to various testimonies, it was handed over to a JNF employee at the graveside. Numerous repeated attempts over the years failed to locate the drape.

My family, together with the World Zionist Organization and the Herzl Museum, initiated the creation of a replica of the Parochet. The replica was dedicated in June 2019 during the official state memorial service for Benjamin Ze'ev Herzl, in the presence of President Reuven Rivlin and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. The replica is on display at the Herzl Museum in Jerusalem.

The circle was finally completed, seventy years after it disappeared, when the original parochet was mysteriously discovered a day after the dedication ceremony, in the storeroom of the JNF headquarters in Tel Aviv!





Reception of the Coffin Drape (*Parochet*), Jerusalem, 1939



Reception of the Coffin Drape (*Parochet*), Jerusalem, 1939. Menachem Ussishkin, President of the JNF, is second from left.

1937
THEODOR HERZL JAHRBUCH

begründet und herausgegeben
von Tulo Nussenblatt

Dr. Heinrich Glanz Verlag/Wien - 1937

Seite 306

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Max Eisler, WIEN:

DAS BAHRTUCH FÜR DIE ÜBERFÜHRUNG DER
GEBEINE HERZLS.

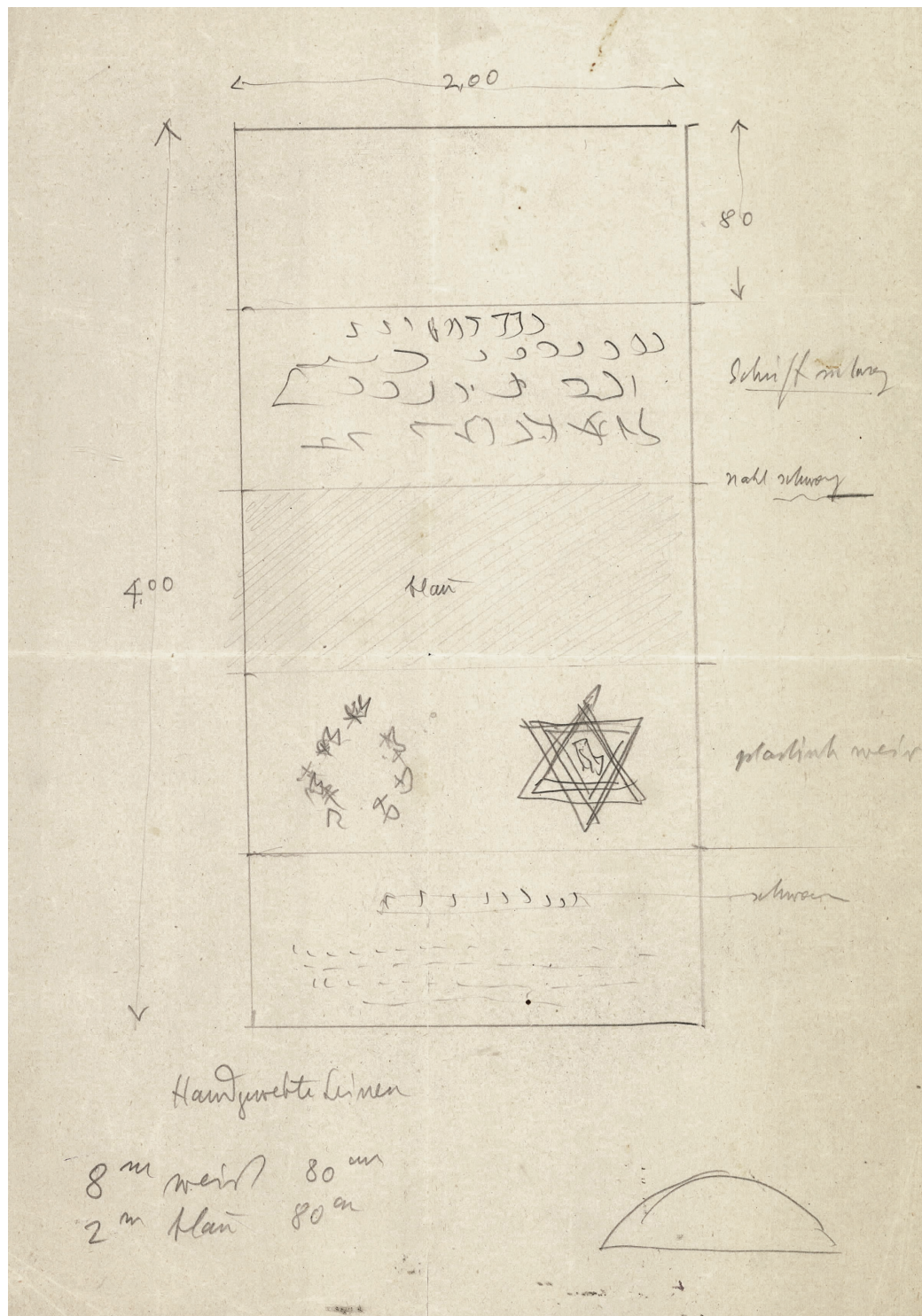
Nachdem der Beschluss gefasst worden war, die Gebeine Theodor Herzls nach Erez Israel zu überführen und ihn in der Erde des heiligen Landes endgültig zu bestatten, wandten sich die Frauen der Wiener "Wizo" an Oskar Strnad, damit er für die letzte Fahrt des toten Führers ein Bahrtuch entwerfen möge. Dieses Tuch ist die letzte Arbeit des grossen Wiener Künstlers geworden.

Strnad ging von der Vorstellung aus, dass der Sarg auf dem Schiff ausgestellt und mit dem Tuch wie mit einer Fahne bedeckt werden solle. Natürlich sollte es juedischer Haende Arbeit und die beste werden, die für den Zweck gedacht werden konnte. So wurde es eine starke Webe in drei waagrechten Streifen: hellgrau, blau und hellgrau. Auf dem mittleren, blauen Streifen erscheinen in weissem Atlas, mit dem Tuch vernäht, sieben Sterne, das Sinnbild des siebenstuendigen Arbeitstages, wie ihn Herzl für das juedische Land geplant hatte, daneben der Loewe Judas im Magen David. Die heraldische Form des steigenden Loewen bereitet schon auf das Ornament der hebraeischen Schrift, das - schwarz auf gelb gestickt - oben den biblischen Spruch aus Ezechiel und Psalmen, unten das Zitat aus den Schriften Herzls zeigt.

In Gemeinschaft mit einer trefflichen juedischen Textilverkstaette, den zionistischen Frauen von Wien und dem Schreiber **Arthur Weisz** hat hier Strnad ein Stueck geschaffen, gleich edel durch die Technik, die Ordnung und den Sinn, meisterhaft nicht nur an sich, sondern auch als lehrhaftes Vorbild, das Tradition und Modernitaet organisch vereinigt - wahrhaftig die Totenfahne eines juedischen Volkshelden und als solche bestimmt, nach der Bestattung innerhalb des Gedenkraumes fuer Herzl im Lande seiner Sehnsucht an einer Wand zu haengen.

x x
x

K O P I E



Sketch of the Coffin Drape (*Parochet*) by Oskar Strand. Vienna, Austria, 1935

RECHTSANWALT
DR. OSKAR GRÜNBAUM
WIEN, I., WALFISCHGASSE 10
TELEPHON R 28-344
POSTSPARKASSEN-KONTO NR. 178.907

WIEN, AM 22. Jänner 1935 193

Wohlgeb. Herrn

IN SACHEN: Priv.

Oberrabbiner Dr. David Feuchtwang,
per Adr. Israelitische Kultusgemeinde

W i e n, I.,
Seitenstettengasse 2.

Sehr geehrter Herr Oberrabbiner !

Ich hatte kürzlich die Ehre, mit Ihnen und Herrn Rabbiner Babad eine Aussprache wegen des Bahrtuches zu haben, das von den Wiener Zionistischen Frauen anlässlich der Ueberführung Theodor Herzls nach Palästina gespendet wird. Herr Prof. Strnad hat sich nun in liebenswürdiger Weise bereit erklärt, den Entwurf für das Bahrtuch zu machen und der Stoff wird bereits von einer jüdischen Handweberin gewebt. Auf dem Stoff sollen nun eine Reihe von hebräischen Inschriften angebracht werden u. zw. teils Worte von Theodor Herzl und teils Sätze aus der heiligen Schrift.

Von Worten Theodor Herzls wird in Betracht gezogen :

Die Schlussworte aus dem Judenstaat:

" Die Welt wird durch unsere Freiheit befreit, durch unseren Reichtum bereichert und vergrößert durch unsere Grösse und was wir dort nur für unser eigenes Gedeihen versuchen, wirkt machtvoll und beglückend hinaus zum Wohle aller Menschen. "

Weiters wird folgender Herzlauspruch in Erwägung gezogen :

./.

חנותנו הנה קטנה
אע"פ כן נמכרין קצת
הדברים הנלווים
וכל מה שיש לנו
שקל להצטרף
הצטרף היום
והצטרף כולו

ה'תרצ"ה כ"ט אלול

" Die Juden, die wollen werden ihren Staat haben."

Schliesslich ein Ausspruch Theodor Herzls :

אני יודע

" Ich weiss nicht wann ich sterben werde, aber der

אני יודע

Zionismus wird weiter leben."

אני יודע

Herr Dir. Dr. Kellner schlägt weiter folgende Aussprüche aus der

אני יודע

Bibel vor :

Jer 62 14, 4;

Jer 31, 16 - 32, 37 (gekürzt) - 61, 34 (gekürzt) -

ferner Ez 37, 12 und Ps. 126, 5, 6

Herr Dir. Dr. Kellner meint jedoch, dass die Verse unter Weglassung des Gottesnamens zu bringen sind und dass Sie, sehr verehrter Herr Oberrabbiner, in der Lage sein werden, uns passende Verse namhaft zu machen. Herr Dir. Dr. Kellner ist event. bereit, den hebräischen Text zu redigieren.

Ich richte an Sie, sehr geehrter Herr Oberrabbiner, das Ersuchen, mich telef. wissen zu lassen, wann ich Sie besuchen kann, um die von Ihnen getroffene Wahl der Verse zur Kenntnis zu nehmen. Ich wäre Ihnen sehr verbunden, wenn das noch im Laufe dieser Woche der Fall sein könnte.

Ich danke Ihnen im vorhinein in meinem Namen und im Namen des Komitees für Ihre freundlichen Bemühungen und zeichne mit dem Ausdrucke

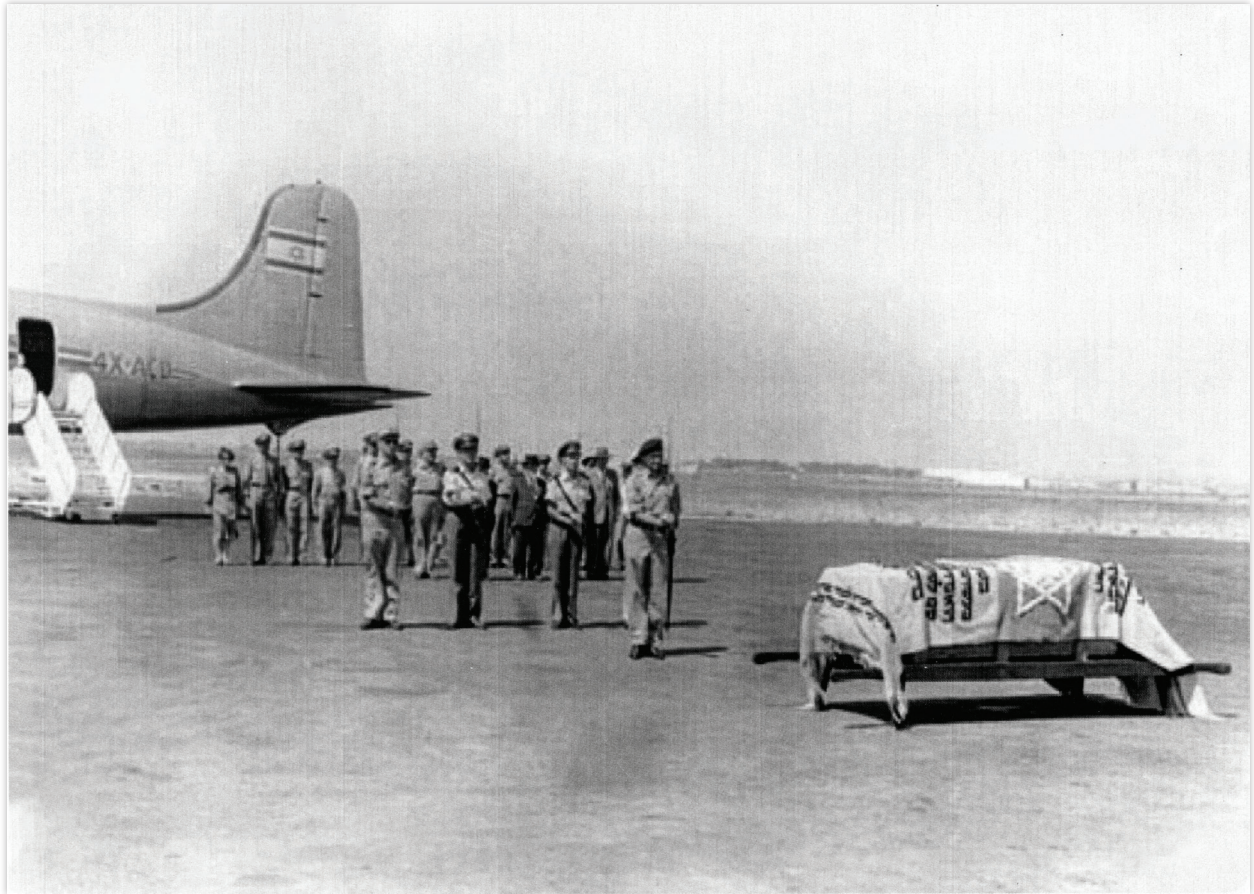
vorzüglichster Hochachtung :

P. 126. 5.6

Dr. Oskar Grunbaum

אני יודע

Letter from Dr. Oskar Grunbaum to Vienna's Chief Rabbi, Dr. David Feuchtwang, about the wording on the Coffin Drape (Parochet). Vienna, Austria, 1935



Herzel's Coffin arrives to Israel, 1949



Selected Artwork

by Arthur Weisz z"l



Haggadah Shel Pesach - Searching for Chametz
Wood cut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

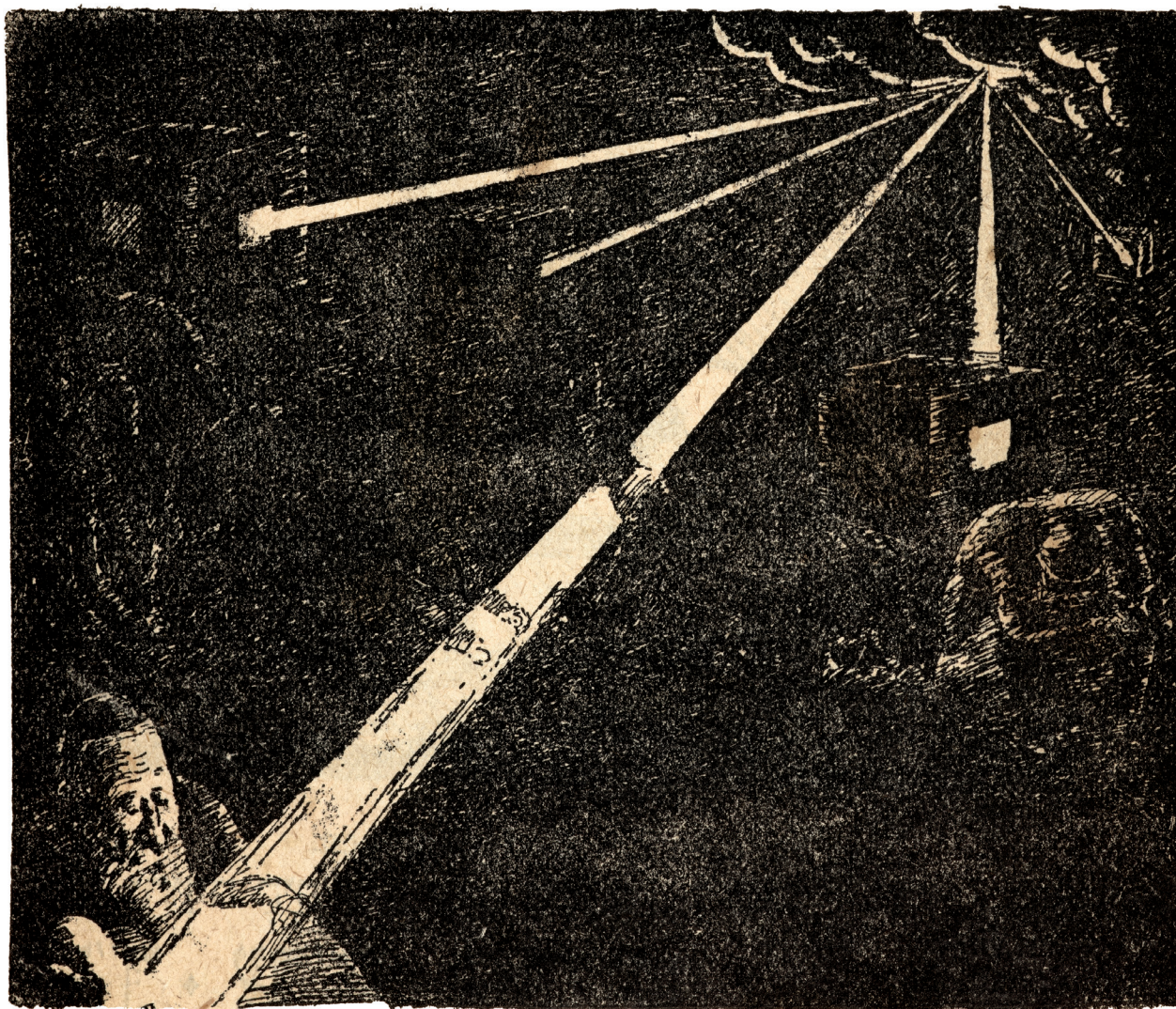
הגדה של פסח - בדיקת חמץ
תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



*Haggadah Shel Pesach -
The Five Sages Celebrating Pesach
in Bnei Brak*

Wood cut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

הגדה של פסח -
"מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה,
וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן, שֶׁהָיוּ מְסֻבִּין בְּבֵנֵי בְרַק"
תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה 1931



Haggadah Shel Pesach - The Plague of Darkness
Woodcut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

הגדה של פסח - מכת חושך
תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



Haggadah Shel Pesach - Crossing the Red Sea
Woodcut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

הגדה של פסח - קריעת ים סוף
תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



Haggadah Shel Pesach - Chad Gadya
Woodcut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

הגדה של פסח - חד גדיא
תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



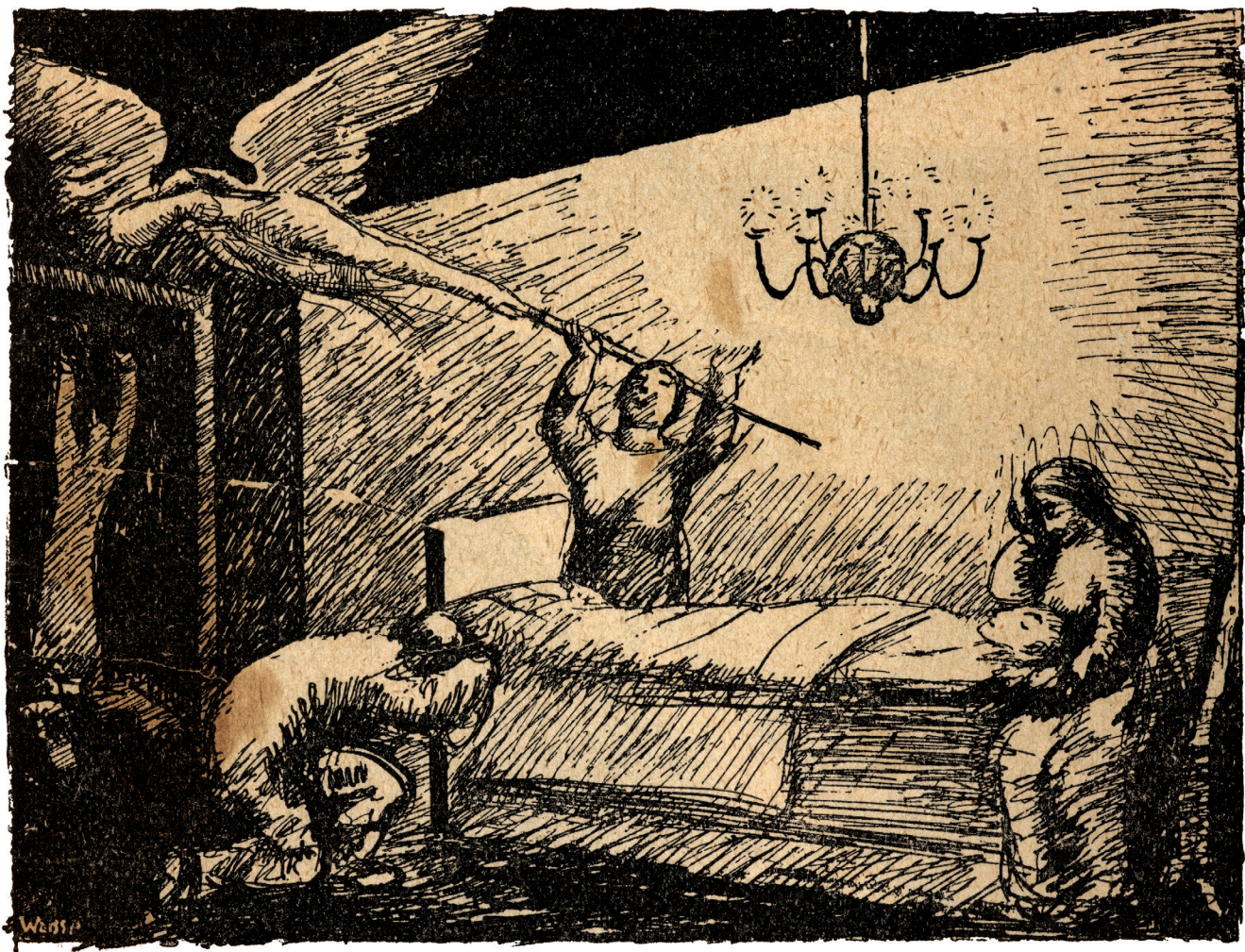
Haggadah Shel Pesach - Pharaoh testing Moshe
(based on the Midrash) Wood cut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

הגדה של פסח - פרעה מנסה את משה
(על פי המדרש) תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



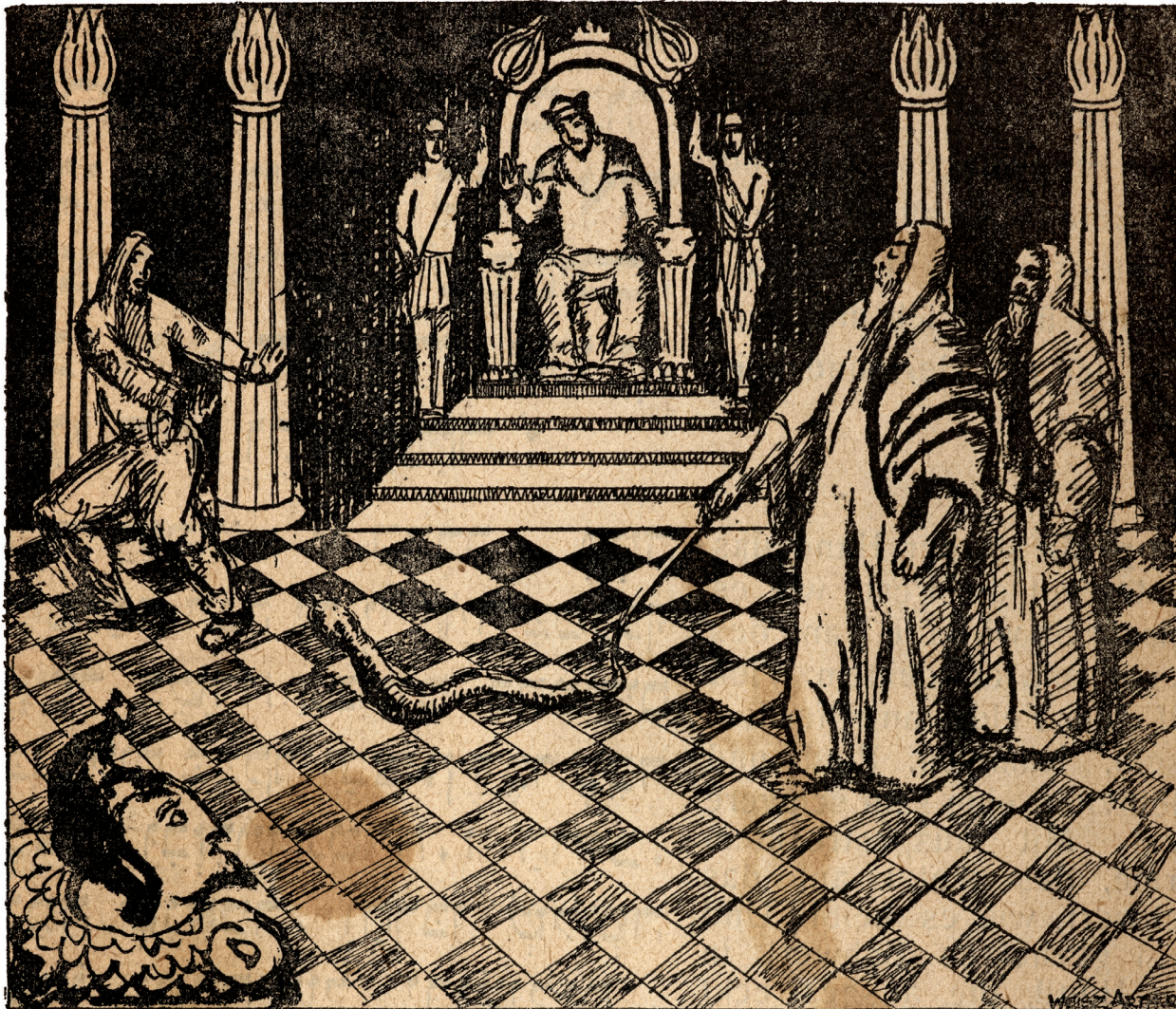
Haggadah Shel Pesach -
Sprinkling the lintel with the blood of the Pesach sacrifice
 Woodcut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

הגדה של פסח -
 התזת דם קורבן הפסח על משקוף הבית
 תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



Haggadah Shel Pesach - Death of the Firstborn
(note the angel covering his eyes)
Woodcut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

הגדה של פסח - מכת בכורות
(המלאך מסתיר את עיניו מן המחזה הנורא)
תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



Haggadah Shel Pesach -
Moshe and Aharon's Staff Turns into a Serpent
 Woodcut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

הגדה של פסח -
 משה ואהרן והמטה אשר נהפך לנחש.
 תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



Haggadah Shel Pesach - The Seder
Woodcut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

הגדה של פסח - ליל הסדר
תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931

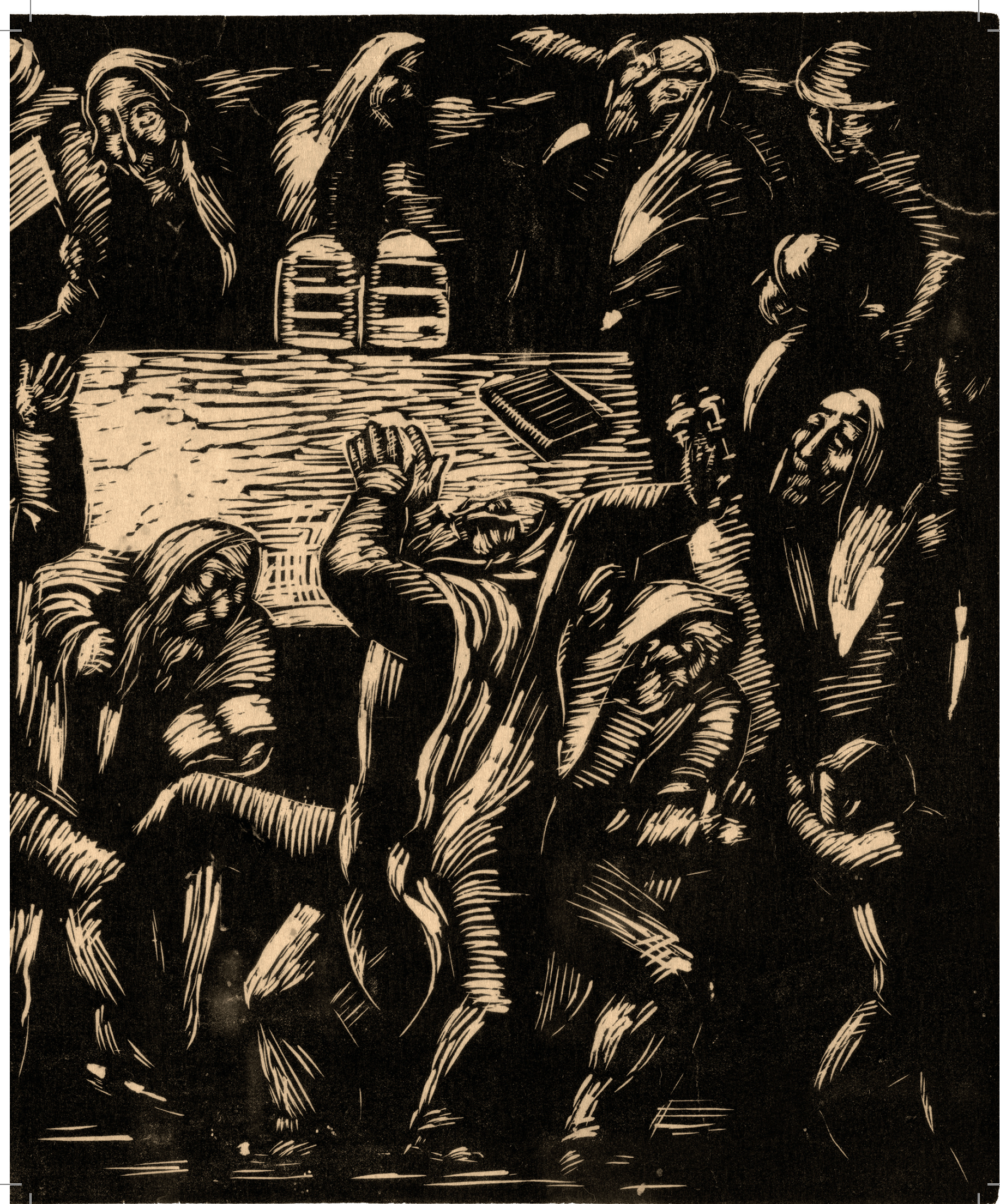
Simchat Torah

Woodcut, Vienna, Austria, 1934

שמחת תורה

תחריט עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, 1934

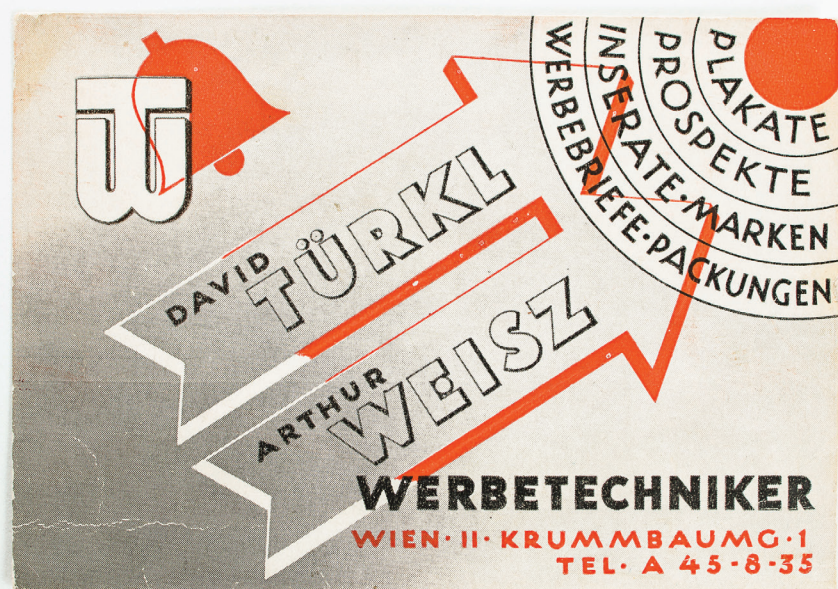






Bookmark with inscription "Give us light, air and sun"
(Publicity for a summer camp)
Print, Vienna, Austria

סימניה "תן לנו אור, אוויר ושמש"
(פרסומת לקייטנת קיץ)
דפוס, וינה, אוסטריה



Business card of Arthur Weisz, Advertising Agency
Print, Vienna, Austria, 1931

כרטיס ביקור של ארתור וייס, חברת פרסום
דפוס, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931

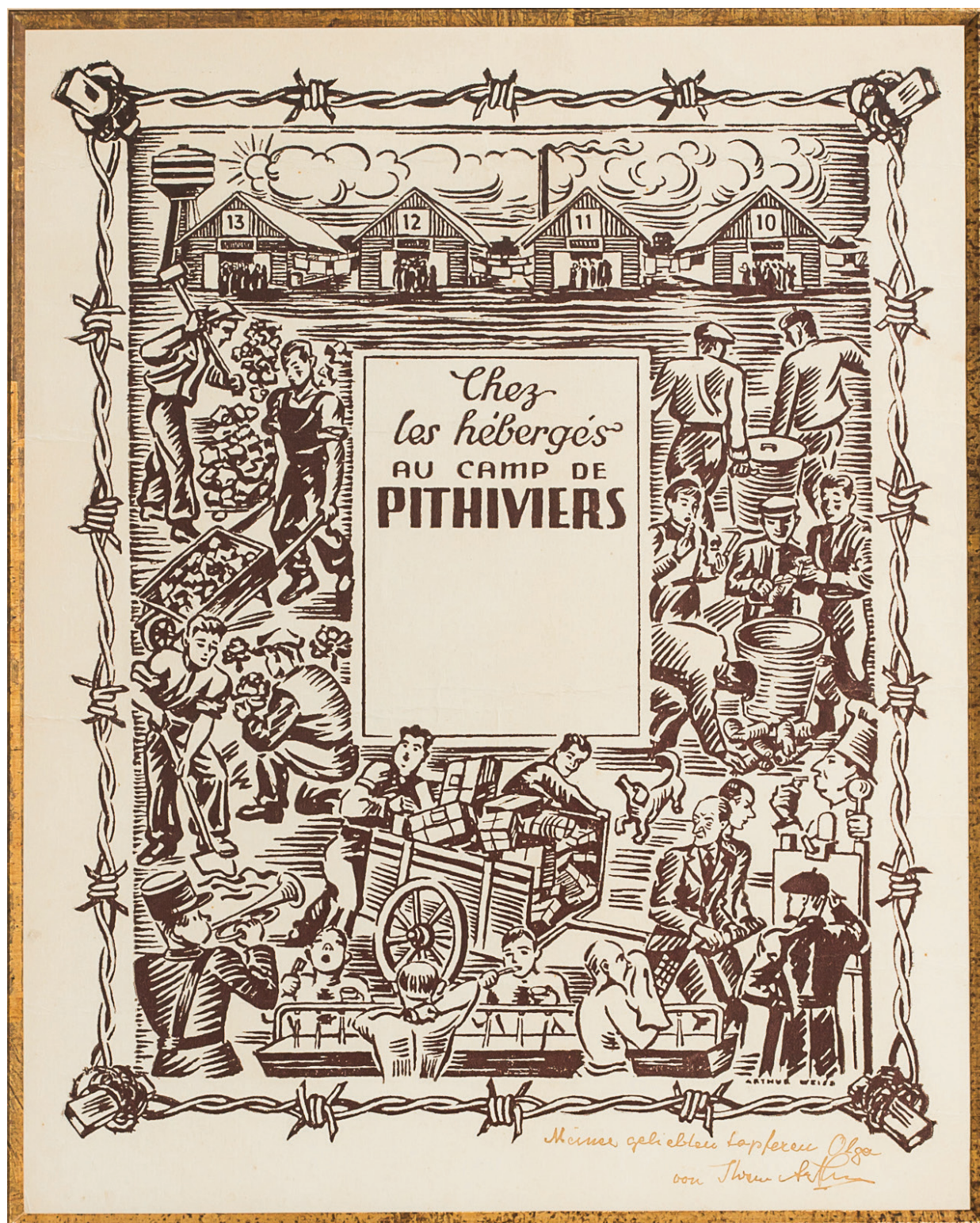


Challah cover

Leather cut, Vienna, Austria, 1931

כיסוי לחלה

מגזרת בד, וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



Scene of daily life in Pithiviers Camp
Woodcut, Pithiviers, France, May 14, 1941

חיי היום יום במחנה פיתיוויה
תחריט עץ, פיתיוויה, צרפת, 14 למאי 1941



Madame Rossi
Pastel, Paris, France, August 1941

גברת רוזי
פסטל, פריז, צרפת, אוגוסט 1941



Unknown Portrait
Pastel, Pithiviers, France, 1941

לא ידוע
פסטל, פיתיוויה, צרפת, 1941

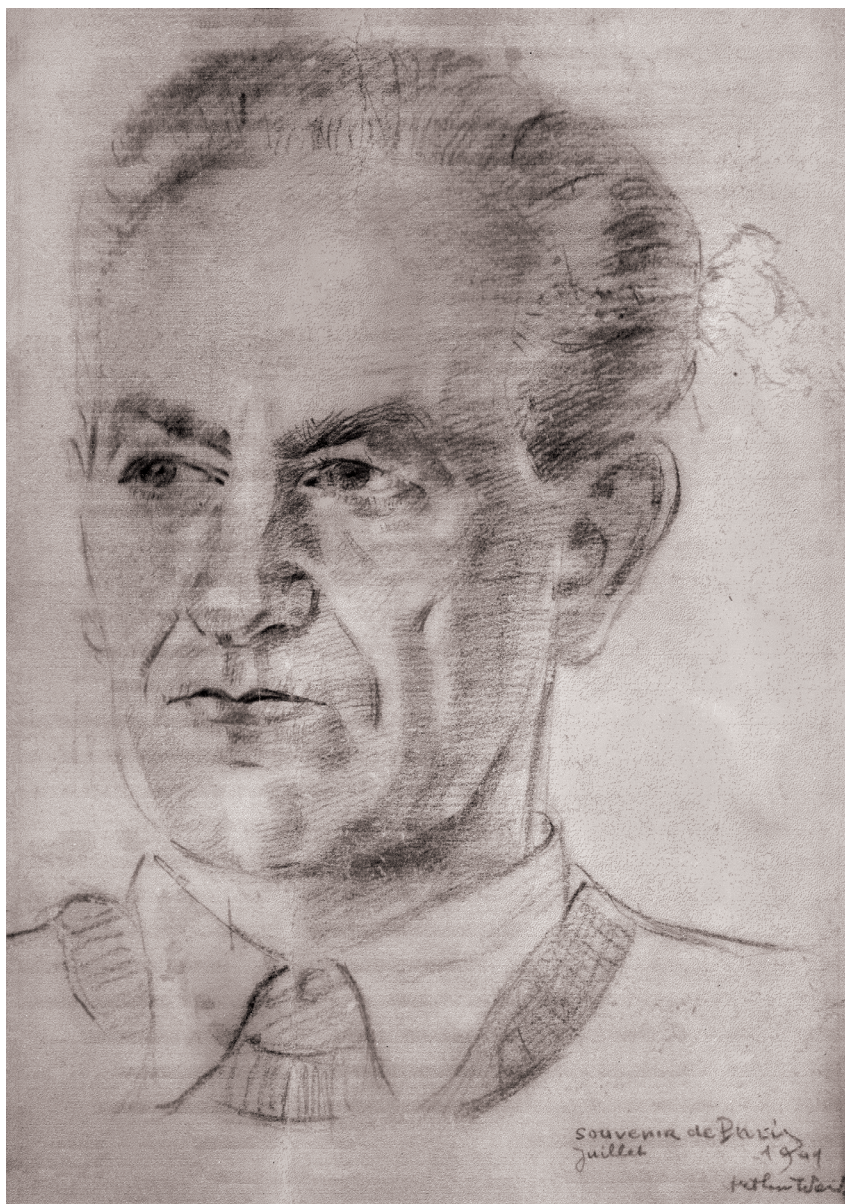


Maurice Fajerman

Charcoal drawing, Paris, France, June 1941

מוריס פכרמן

רישום בפחם, פיתיוויה, צרפת, יוני 1941

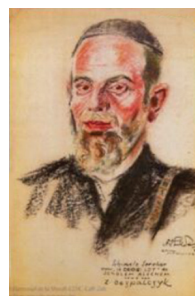


Israel Fishman

Charcoal drawing, Pithiviers, France, July 1941

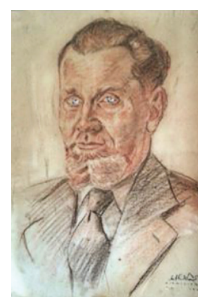
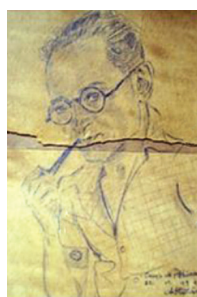
ישראל פישמן

רישום בפחם, פיתיוויה, צרפת, יולי 1941



Israel Fishman

Zwiłen Bezpalczyk

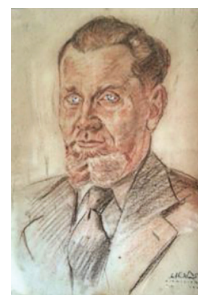
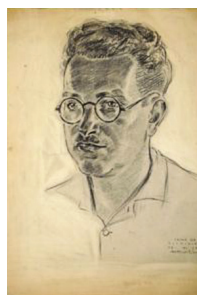


Jacob Glass

Charles Nagler

Charles Nagler

Charles Nagler

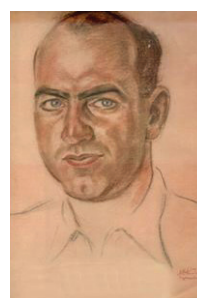
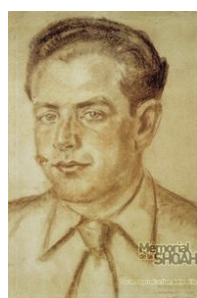


Charles Nagler

Victor Sattinger

Chaim Goldszajn

Isaak Grinhaus



David Edelman

Moszek Stoczyk

Sender Senderwicz

Portraits of Prisoners
Pithiviers, France, 1941-2

דיוקנאות של אסירים במחנה
פיתיוויה, צרפת 1941-2



Self Portrait (Arthur Weisz)
Charcoal drawing, Pithiviers, France, July, 1941

דיוקן עצמי (ארתור וייס)
רישום בפחם, פיתיוויה, צרפת, יולי, 1941



Letter opener (gift for Yudith)
Crafted wood, Pithiviers, France, 1942

פותר מעטפות
גילוף בעץ, פיתיוויה, צרפת, 1942



Jewish Calendar for Tseirei Agudas Yisroel
Print, Vienna, Austria, 1929

לוח שנה עבור צעירי אגודת ישראל
דפוס, וינה, אוסטריה, 1929



Torah Reading in Synagogue
Woodcut, Vienna, Austria, July 1933

קריאת התורה בבית הכנסת
תחרית עץ, וינה, אוסטריה, יולי 1933



Copper Stamping
Vienna, Austria, 1931

ריקוע נחושת
וינה, אוסטריה, 1931



Chanukkiyah
Copper, Vienna, Austria, 1936

חנוכייה
נחושת, וינה, אוסטריה, 1936



אז אני יודע ליהנות "לעצמי" מהחיים
 ארנסט
 PITHIVIERS 15. MAI 42

Self Portrait (Arthur Weisz)
 Pastel, Pithiviers, France, May 14, 1942

דיוקן עצמי (ארנסט וייס)
 פסטל, פיתיוויה, צרפת, 14 למאי, 1942

